Non-payment of amount by Haj Committee

†2142. SHRI AJAY MAROO: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state;

(a) whether it is a fact that Central Haj Committee owes a huge sum to Air India;

(b) if so, the amount outstanding;

(c) the reasons for non-payment of this amount by Central Haj Committee; and

(d) the action being taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) An amount of approximately Rs. 29 crores is being claimed by Air India as outstanding against the Central Haj Committee which itself has a counter claim of approximately Rs. 32 crores.

(d) The Central Haj Committee has been requested to settle this matter at an early date.

Indians working in Lebanon

2143. SHRIMATI PREMA CARIAPPA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) by when it was known about attack by fellow forces in Lebanon;

(b) the number of Indians living in Lebanon at that time; and

(c) what efforts have been made by Government to help Indians working in different parts of Lebanon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The outbreak of hostilities in the region was reported by the media and by our Mission in Tel Aviv on 12th July, 2006.

(b) At the outbreak of hostilities in Lebanon, approximately 12,000 Indians nationals were resident in Lebanon.

(c) The safety and welfare of Indian nationals who were resident in Lebanon has been our foremost concern. On July 17 2006, anticipating

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

a further deterioration in the security situation, an advisory was issued to all Indian nationals, particularly those living in Southern Lebanon, to take suitable precautions regarding their personal safety. They were advised to keep their travel documents in readiness and remain in contact with the Indian Embassy in Beirut, who had been instructed to render necessary advice and updated information on the evolving situation.

1782 Indians desiring to leave Lebanon have been evacuated so far. The Government of India arranged Indian naval ships to ferry these Indian nationals from Lebanon to Larnaca (Cyprus) and from there Air India brought them to India. A small number have also been evacuated *via* Damascus. Approximately 10,000 Indian nationals remain in Lebanon as they have opted to stay there. Our Mission in Beirut continues processing request for evacuations of Indian nationals in Lebanon and is in contact with them through various Indian organizations and is making necessary arrangements for Indian nationals desiring to leave Lebanon.

Discussion with Bangladesh

2144. SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the number of rounds of discussions held between India and Bangladesh during the last one year;

(b) the decisions arrived at in the matters of transit movement of goods and people; and

(c) the over-all progress made so far in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) In addition to the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister to India in March 2006, there have been meetings of the Joint Rivers Commission, Joint Boundary Working Groups, Joint Group of Customs Officials, Joint Working Group on Trade and of the Home Secretaries of the two countries.

(b) and (c) Bangladesh has not agreed to provide transit facilities to India for movement of goods and people through its territory. Government of India will continue to raise the issue of transit with Bangladesh.